United Nations S/PV.4474*

Security Council

Fifty-seventh year

Provisional

4474th meeting

Thursday, 21 February 2002, 3 pm

New York

President	Mr. Aguilar Zinser	(Mexico)
Members	Bulgaria	Mr. Raychev
	Cameroon	Mr. Belinga-Eboutou
	China	Mr. Wang Yingfan
	Colombia	Mr. Rivas
	France	Mr. Levitte
	Guinea	Mr. Diallo
	Ireland	Mr. Ryan
	Mauritius	Mr. Bhuckory
	Norway	Mr. Strømmen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Lavrov
	Singapore	Ms. Foo
	Syrian Arab Republic	Mr. Wehbe
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Jeremy Greenstock
	United States of America	Mr. Negroponte

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

Identical letters dated 20 February 2002 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and to the President of the Security Council (S/2002/182)

Letter dated 20 February 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Yemen to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2002/184)

* Reissued for technical reasons.

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02-25984* (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

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Letter dated 20 February 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Yemen to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2002/184)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Israel and Yemen, in which they request to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In accordance with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the discussion without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, the representative of Israel took a seat at the Council table.

At the invitation of the President, the representative of Yemen took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I should also like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 21 February 2002 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2002/186 and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council to be held today, Thursday, 21 February 2002, regarding the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to participate in the meeting in accordance with the rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in response to the letter dated 20 February 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Yemen to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council, document S/2002/184, and to the letter dated 20 February 2002 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations, document S/2002/182.

I should also like to draw attention to documents received so far during the month of February, namely, S/2002/185, S/2002/175, S/2002/174, S/2002/165, S/2002/164, S/2002/155, S/2002/146 and S/2002/142.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, the Council will hear at this meeting a statement by the Secretary-General. Thereafter, I, as President of the Security Council, will make a statement on behalf of the Council.

I welcome the presence of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, and invite him to take the floor.

The Secretary-General: The news from the Middle East is grim. Day by day, the toll of dead and wounded on both sides mounts. Day by day, the bitterness and mutual distrust between Israelis and Palestinians intensifies. Increasingly, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict risks sliding towards full-fledged war. Truly, we are nearing the edge of the abyss.

During the past seven days there have been more than 60 deaths on both sides. Unless something happens to change the dynamic, it is all too likely that violence will escalate still further. Particularly

alarming is the growing belief, among both Palestinians and Israelis, that there can be no negotiated solution to the conflict. As we all know, hopelessness and despair tend to lead to more extreme measures, with tragic consequences for the region.

Eighteen months after the beginning of the second intifada, the cost to both Israelis and Palestinians grows ever higher in terms of human suffering, bitterness, disillusion and mistrust. The key problems remain occupation; security — the need to end violence, including terrorism; and economic deprivation and suffering. These are interlinked problems, encompassing the political, security and economic domains.

Yet even at this darkest of hours, there is still room for hope. In the midst of the bitterness and the despair, with clamour on both sides for revenge and for ever more desperate and reckless measures, there is a path back to the negotiating table — if the parties choose to take it.

Let us not forget that the parties have agreed, in principle, that there is a way out — namely, the Tenet understandings and the Mitchell recommendations. Taken together, these documents defined an array of security, economic and political measures that would have moved the parties back to the table to negotiate the fundamental issues that divide them.

However, "in principle" is not "in practice". In fact, as we know, the parties have not implemented either of these plans. If Tenet and Mitchell have not failed, they can certainly not be said to have succeeded. Clearly, the situation that is now unfolding requires urgent steps, moving beyond a discussion focused on how to pursue Tenet and Mitchell.

New thinking and imaginative new ideas are now being proposed from several quarters. This is to be welcomed, and such ideas should be considered promptly and thoroughly, both by the parties and by the international community. A reduction in the violence is the most immediate priority. But I have become more and more convinced that trying to resolve the security problem on its own cannot work. Security cannot be dealt with in isolation; it has to have a context. It has to be addressed alongside key political issues, particularly the question of land, and economic and social issues, including the increasingly critical, desperate conditions of the Palestinians.

Failure to address these issues together will only spawn new and perhaps deadlier exchanges of reciprocal violence. Unless both parties have a political horizon on which their hopes for peace and an improved livelihood can be based, there will be no enduring ceasefire. It is imperative that both parties exercise maximum restraint, particularly with regard to attacks against civilians. It cannot be overemphasized that both parties must adhere to their obligations under international law to protect the basic rights of civilians, including the right to security.

The lack of mutual confidence between the two sides makes a third party role essential. The breakdown of trust is so total that neither side will believe the other when it comes to the implementation of agreements. I truly believe that it is imperative for the Security Council and the wider international community to work in a concerted manner with the parties towards a just, lasting and comprehensive peaceful settlement of the conflict in the Middle East.

As the Council knows, I and my representative have throughout been in very close contact with leaders on both sides, in the region and among the international community. However, in light of the gravity of the situation, I have asked my Special Coordinator, Terje Roed-Larsen, to intensify his consultations with the parties and with members of the "Quartet", as well as with regional and international actors.

The outlook is bleak. But the present course of events is not irreversible. There is a high road — which the parties themselves were on not so long ago — as well as a low road. Let us do everything in our power to persuade the parties to pull back from the brink and return to the high road.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as President of the Security Council.

I thank the Secretary-General, in my capacity as President of the Security Council, for the frankness, clarity and sense of urgency with which he set forth his thinking, as well as that of his envoys, on the situation in the Middle East. One thing that we all share with him is that we repudiate violence — it resolves nothing. We regret the vicious circle and spiral of aggression and death in the Middle East — in Palestine, Israel and the occupied territories. We share

his view that the situation is intolerable and entails serious risks for international security. We deplore the suffering of the civilian population, the loss of human life and the destruction. All of us want to do something to bring it to an end. We support the United Nations presence in the conflict scenario. We support the efforts of the Secretary-General, and we are concerned about the safety of personnel deployed throughout the region. The concern and dedication that the Secretary-General brings to his work does honour to the Organization.

This meeting, at which we heard from the Secretary-General about the serious situation in the Middle East, is part of a process. Not without difficulty, the members of the Security Council reached agreement on holding periodic consultations as to the situation in the Middle East, based upon information and points of view afforded us by the Secretariat. We have already met informally on two occasions. We are now meeting publicly, as a preamble to the debate that we have agreed to hold shortly.

That is why the members of the Council have preferred not to speak on the situation in Palestine or on the role that the Security Council might play. We look forward to that debate. The effort that we can make to contribute to peace, to resolve the conflict and to halt the bloodshed will be an essential part of our deliberations. The delegation of Palestine and the Group of Arab States have asked us urgently to convene a meeting to discuss and consider their proposals. We will do so as soon as those proposals are ready.

Meanwhile, the members of the Council welcome the words of the Secretary-General. We shall analyse his opinions and consider his suggestions. On that basis, and in consultation with our capitals, we shall prepare to argue our positions and, above all, to propose new initiatives. We will make a great effort to resolve our differences. We all want to give the Organization and the Security Council the opportunity to become part of the solution as of today.

As we explore, together with the Secretary-General, new ways for the United Nations to become active in the Middle East, we share the conviction of the Secretary-General and of Secretariat officials that essential elements of peace-building are the political will of the parties, confidence-building between them, prudence and mutual consideration. Without these, any international effort will prove futile. In doing our utmost to achieve such understanding, we will be living up to our own responsibilities and fulfilling our Organization's mandate.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I intend to adjourn the meeting now and will convene the next meeting on this item after further consultations with members of the Security Council.

The meeting rose at 3.30 p.m.